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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

E H R N O

NIC 00099-86
7 January 1986

National Intelligence Council

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Graham E. Fuller
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: Qadhafi--The Psychological State of the Regime

1. We talk a great deal about how much public support Qadhafi may or may not enjoy in Libya. Our publications accurately point out that Qadhafi has managed to alienate most segments of his country over the past 15 years.

-- Yet in Arab politics popularity is not really the main issue. In the Arab political mind the critical perception is how strong the leader is, how invulnerable he appears to attack. Any prospect of Western action against Qadhafi must consider primarily its psychological affect on the perception of Qadhafi's strength.

2. If Qadhafi comes under meaningful Western pressure including possible military attack, it could well serve to convince his Libyan opponents that the end is in sight. Like an aging stag, the dogs will set upon him much faster if he appears to weaken. Western action must make it appear that Qadhafi has run out of luck.

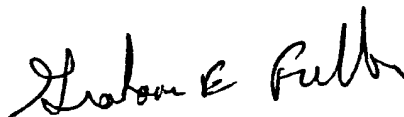
-- Conversely, if Western action has no effect or is fecklessly carried out, Qadhafi will parade Western impotence to convince all his enemies that he is invulnerable. It is this perception of invulnerability that is much more important to his survival than is any vague sense of "popularity."

3. To date, Qadhafi has shown himself to be largely invulnerable--at least from Western pressure. None of his external enemies have taken significant action even during periods of great crisis: the US, Egypt, Israel, or Algeria. Qadhafi probably is more certain with each passing incident that he is safe in this regard. The only good news is that such calculation may cause him to overplay his hand.

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4. Qadhafi remains obsessed with preserving this same psychological sense of invulnerability and sense of control in domestic politics. His primary preoccupation abroad is the elimination of dissidents--far more than any other target. It is not that these dissidents have the power to destroy him directly, but that they represent open public hostility to him that threatens his image of invulnerability. Qadhafi could possibly unwind very fast psychologically if he feels directly under seige, if the disorder around him grows--and more important--if his enemies come to believe that his political life has run its course. Luck and verve matter more than "popularity" in the Arab scheme.



Graham E. Fuller

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